

SARDIS: THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The City:

- "Sardis is best remembered as the birthplace of modern money because here the first coins were minted."
- "It was notorious for its pleasures and luxury-loving spirit."
- Known for their production of wool garments
- There doesn't seem to be any indicator of persecution or Caesar worship.
- It was known to be an impregnable fortress. Only one entrance from the South. The other three sides were, what they thought, unscalable mountain rock 1500 feet above the plain.
- However, they were overconfident. Twice in its history Sardis had been conquered when its watchmen failed to see the enemy combing its cliffs and walls, so the people knew the importance of alertness. The Persian king, Cyrus, captured Sardis in 549 B.C. He offered a reward to any man who found a way to penetrate what seemed to be an unscalable mountain. One of his men observed that a Lydian soldier on the rampart above accidentally dropped his helmet down the mountainside. The Lydian soldier carefully picked his way down through a narrow crevice to recover his helmet and climbed back again. That night the observant Persian soldier led a band of men up the cliffs by the way he had meticulously marked in his memory. They found the battlements completely unguarded because the Lydian king never thought anyone could find a way up the side of the steep cliffs. Sardis felt completely safe and secure, but that night the city fell to the enemy.

The History:

- We're not sure. When both Jews and Greeks throughout Asia heard the word in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).
- Did Jews from Asia (Acts 2:9) carry the word back home?

Sardis:

vs. 1a And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of Him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

- **Revelation 5:6** equate the seven spirits with seven eyes. In **Rev. 1:4** it looks like a reference to the Spirit.
- In the days of Zechariah, it looked to some as though the temple (begun about 16 years previously) would never be completed. God assembles the people and has a top stone set before Zerubbabel (**see 4:7**). He swears that Zerubbabel, who started it, would finish it. On the stone are seven eyes. God's eyes. God is challenging the people in **3:9** to look at this top stone. Read **2 Chronicles 16:9** for the same principle.

vs. 1b **I know** your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

- There's nothing in the text about threats from without (Jezebel, Balaam, Nicolaitans, Satan's throne, etc.). It looks like their biggest enemy was themselves. Interesting, those who don't have threats without struggle with internal obstacles (no love, spiritually dead/asleep and lukewarmness).
- Reputation:
 - Don't know who coined it, but it's been said, "Reputation is what others say about you, but character is what one really is."
 - The Greek term is defined as "recognition accorded a person on the basis of performance, (well-known) name, reputation, fame"
 - Were they saying this about themselves? Were others saying this about them? Were both true? Reputation has to do with what others say about you. Others saying it doesn't make it true. You both saying it doesn't make it true. What Jesus says is true.
- I was thinking this week: should "a name" matter?

- **1 Corinthians 4:3**, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even just myself."
 - **2 Corinthians 5:11b**, "But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience."
 - **2 Corinthians 8:21**, "for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man."
 - **Romans 12:17**, "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all."
 - So, surely we should care, correct? A shepherd, for example, must have a good reputation. Titus was told to be a model of good works, etc. so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about Christ's followers (**Titus 2:7-8**).
 - **Proverbs 22:1** A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.
 - **Ecclesiastes 7:1** A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.
 - Perhaps the next question, the other layer, is why would we want a good name? To be honored by people or to honor God? Are any of us "good?"
 - It's a terrifying statement the more you think about it. From a biblical standpoint, such a person finds company with men like the Pharisees or the Israelites of old. People who honored God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. People who seek the scriptures because they "believe in them you find eternal life", yet their actions prove spiritual suicide. It's also scary, because sometimes we go through lows and we struggle spiritually discerning: are we simply struggling or are we posers? So, this one can be scary.
 - What gives a congregation such a reputation? A large church? Big building? Great preacher? Staying busy (several events and a plethora of bible studies offered)? Finances? Incredible "worship" experience? Do any of these things necessarily mean everything is okay?
- vs. 2-3** Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of My God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.
- **"Wake up!"** I wonder if we're too sensitive when discussing parenting techniques. I understand we need to use wisdom - how you talk to an adult isn't always the same as how you talk to a child, but many times we struggle with adults as well. We're afraid to say what needs to be said. "Wake up - you're about to die." This is acceptable and bears fruit, especially when it comes from someone who truly loves us. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." (**Proverbs 27:5-6**) "Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue." (**Proverbs 28:23**) "Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it." (**Psalms 141:5**)
 - In the spirit of Daniel 5:27, "TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting;"
 - **Strengthen** - *to cause to be inwardly firm or committed, confirm, establish, strengthen* -
 - like what Jesus told Peter - "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:31-32
 - There is some similarity the Ephesus. They had started a good work, but it was not complete. We, as a congregation, want to be friends to one another, push each other, and if need be, say what needs to be even if it's difficult. Remember when we first began this work? Remember the excitement? Do we still have that? Is what we're doing genuine? Put aside, for a moment, what our reputation may or may not be to others. What does Jesus think about us? What does He see? What does He want for you? You know it's only good and genuine. He seeks to bless, not curse. To build up, not break down.

- **Come like a thief** - Robber bands hid in the hills (says Banks) and so coming as a thief would be especially significant . . . the night climb against the city when it first fell would fit well the language aimed at impressing the hearers.
 - I don't believe this is referencing His second coming. It seems to be a conditional coming and that doesn't fit with the second coming. However, they were familiar with this kind of language. See **Revelation 16:15**;
- vs. 4-6** Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. **The one who conquers** will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- Let's continue to remember: churches won't approach the throne of God. Individuals do.
- Warning:
 - **Jude 22-23** And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.
- The Book:
 - **Exodus 32:32**; But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.”
 - **Philippians 4:3**; Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
- Confession:
 - **Matthew 10:32**; So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven,
 - **Luke 12:8**; “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,
- Let's not forget:
 - **Luke 15:20-28**; For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.
 - We're here to celebrate with you. We're not like the older brother - struggling to celebrate inside where there was music and dancing. Where everyone was feasting on the fattened calf in celebration.
 - “The older brother was outside staking his claim, while the younger brother was inside claiming his steak!” Listen, we want to claim some steak with you!